View from the peak

July 2020

A publication from

mhcc
mental health coordinating council

Rapid Evolution of Community Mental Health During COVID

As NSW contemplates a return to tougher restrictions, it is understandable that apprehension is growing. These are difficult times and while Australia has sidestepped some of the most severe population health implications, the rise in unemployment, changing workplace demands, continued social distancing and real possibility of more lock-downs has impacted our wellbeing.

Knowing that data can tell the story, many surveys were conducted by MHCC member organisations and others throughout the pandemic. These show that among the most affected are young women – both financially and in regards to mental health. More generally, people who are already disadvantaged have been impacted disproportionately and there has been a rise in anxiety, distress and substance use.

In response, mental health organisations have gone to extraordinary lengths to meet the needs of the people they support, many rapidly turning to digital technology. This was welcomed by some, particularly younger people, resulting in more people showing up to appointments. Many liked the flexibility of telehealth services. However, some who previously benefited from face-to-face and drop-in services found the transition to digital difficult, and some didn't have the technology or know-how to connect. A significant number of people with complex mental health challenges disconnected from services.

The pandemic has been a catalyst for change and it is unlikely services will go back to the way things were. More research is needed to understand the impact of telehealth. Service gains should be retained - a blended model of service delivery may be the way forward for many organisations - and lessons learned must underpin future responses. MHCC is committed to working with member organisations, people with a lived experience, and other stakeholders to ensure our sectors' experiences inform future decision making about how, when and where services are best delivered.

Highlights

FROM THE CEO

Message from the CEO

The work of MHCC has continued apace throughout the COVID-19 restrictions and while working remotely has posed challenges, it has also provided opportunities to engage and connect in different ways.

MHCC have been holding regular zoom meetings of member organisations and continue to advocate on behalf of members, including successfully lobbying the Ministry to provide additional funding for CMOs for technology related costs. We have also been meeting regularly with the Mental Health Commission, Being and Mental Health Carers.

Some fabulous resources for the community sector are now available as a result of our NSW and National ILC projects. The enhanced reimagine.today website includes new co-designed resources to make it more accessible for Indigenous, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and regional and rural communities and the Community Engagement Education Project (CEEP) includes 6 short videos to improve mental health awareness among the broader community sector.

Last month I chaired my first meeting of the Mental Health Commission Community Advisory Council. It is a real privilege to work with a group of passionate, knowledgeable and committed people to support the Commission in the important work it does and promote the community mental health sector. There is so much to be proud of in the sector, particularly the innovative and flexible way services have responded during the pandemic, continuing to support people living with mental health conditions, despite the restrictions.

Many members have commented favourably on the sharing of experiences through MHCC zoom meetings. As we slowly transition out of lockdown arrangements, MHCC will continue to hold regular zoom webinars with a guest speaker and will also return to holding face-to-face events when the social distancing requirements make it safe and affordable to do so. I look forward to the time when we can again easily and safely connect in person. In the meantime stay well.

MHCC CEO: Carmel Tebbutt

> " MHCC lobbied the Ministry to provide additional funding for CMOs for technology-related costs "

NDIS

Reimagine Stage 2 Launch:

Supporting Diverse Communities to Access the NDIS

Reimagine Stage 2 has now launched. The last months on this project changed dramatically with COVID-19. Peer Leaders across Australia wrapped up their work in new and creative ways, including co-design sessions via zoom, posted packages and phone calls. Peer Leaders worked tirelessly, alongside their co-design groups, to finalise over 20 new eLearning, video and printable resources that are hosted on reimagine.today. We hope the new resources will be useful for capacity-building, for people on their NDIS journeys as well as in life more generally. Resources are designed by and for people from priority populations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ people and people living in rural and remote areas.

Reimagine Stage 2 launched via webinar on 29 May. Aunty Ann Weldon gave a beautiful Welcome to Country, welcoming people nationally to Gadigal land, where the launch was hosted. MHCC CEO Carmel Tebbutt acknowledged the work of so many on the project, in particular our project partners. Gerry Naughtin, NDIA Mental Health Advisor, noted the importance of the Reimagine project in the broader context of ensuring increased access to the NDIS by people with psychosocial disability, in particular those from our priority groups.

Highlights of reimagine.today:

- Community Hubs developed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ communities, multicultural communities and rural and remote communities
- A website translated into Arabic, Assyrian, Simplified Chinese, Korean, Persian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese
- A Self-Care hub
- An app version workbook
- Resources to support skill-building for the NDIS journey

"The strength of the resource is acknowledging barriers and sharing strategies and successes. It encourages us to celebrate little steps and break challenges into manageable chunks. I hope others look through reimagine.today and find a place where they feel understood, where their resilience and strengths are acknowledged and where they find hope for their future"

- NSW/ACT Peer Leader, Laurie Taylor.

Supporting Community Connection

Free Learning Materials Launch

Supporting Community Connection

How can you help people living with mental health challenges to lead more fulfilling lives in the communities of their choice?

Too often people feel unable to help others living with mental health challenges. People may think they lack the knowledge and skills to help. They may believe mental health conditions are incurable or that people living with mental health challenges present a danger to them or others. In a post COVID-19 world, where we can expect to meet more people experiencing mental distress, we all need skills to recognise and respond to people experiencing mental distress in ways that are helpful and prevent psychiatric crisis.

MHCC has developed free learning materials to help people, programs, organisations and communities to better support people living with mental health challenges to live more fulfilling lives in the communities of their choice. The materials are for Community Workers outside of mental health work settings and others. They will be helpful to supporters of people living with mental health challenges – both paid and unpaid – within and outside of the health/mental health and disability/social care sectors.

In 2018, the NDIA funded MHCC for a 2-year Information, Linkages and Capacity-building project to strengthen communities and support people with mental health conditions outside of the NDIS. MHCC's Community Engagement Education Package Project thus developed the suite of free learning materials under the banner "Supporting Community Connection".

The learning materials help people understand and use recovery-oriented, trauma-informed and rights-based approaches when supporting people living with mental health conditions, enabling connection, informed decision-making and increased participation in community activities.

"In a post COVID-19 world, where we meet more people experiencing mental distress, we all need skills to respond to people experiencing mental distress."

Co-design groups worked to make learning materials connect with people in a real way

Supporting Community Connection

The learning materials from the Supporting Community Connection project were co-designed with people with lived experience of mental health challenges and other project partners. We outline the final content, co-design and trial of the learning resources in the Good Practice Guide and Project Report, now available on the MHCC website. The Good Practice Guide describes what you can do to build capacity within communities and support people living with mental health challenges to be better connected to their communities of their choice.

Learning materials for each key topic in the Supporting Community Connection project include trainer guides, Power Point presentations and videos. The materials were trialled over two half-days of face-to-face training. This approach, along with a University of Sydney trial evaluation, allowed MHCC to understand what content worked best. These materials are free and can be adapted to your organisation's needs, to better support people with mental health challenges in your communities.

What is Recovery?
Understand the importance of hope, purpose and meaning when healing from the impacts of a mental health condition.

Community Inclusion
Discover what makes supportive environments in recovery.

Supports & Services
Deepen your knowledge of supports and services outside of the NDIS and crisis mental health services.

Embracing Change
New approaches and practices in mental health reform, NDIS and ILC implementation.

Creating Healing Environments
Create safe and healing environments in trauma-informed care and practice.

Empowerment
The importance of self-direction as a recovery tool.

READ MORE & DOWNLOAD LEARNING MATERIALS

Webinar guests Christine Reagan and Graham Humphreys, NDIS Commission & Kate Wilson, One Door

Embracing Change: Sharing Info on NDIS Practice Standards

The Embracing Change Project Team ran its fourth webinar on May 28, addressing some of the weightiest aspects of the NDIS Practice Standards. The webinar looked at complaints management, incident management, human resources and continuity of supports. Discussion also covered COVID-19 responses, including business continuity planning and emergency management plans.

The webinar had three guest speakers: Christine Regan, State Director NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, Graham Humphreys, Director of Complaints for NSW/ACT, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and Kate Wilson, Quality and Safety Manager, One Door Mental Health. The webinar was well received and audiences particularly appreciated practical examples provided by Kate Wilson.

The Project Team is currently developing a Self-audit Tool for Psychosocial Disability Service Providers, based on work undertaken by National Disability Services and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. Get in touch if you would like to provide feedback on this.

The Project Team has also been engaging with the Project Advisory Group, MHCC members and sister Community Mental Health peaks around the country to learn more about emerging quality and safeguarding issues for psychosocial disability service providers. This is the initial stage of the greater National Engagement Plan which is currently under development.

Webinar 5 took place on 2 July. This covered the service provision environment and practice standards, access to supports, support planning and management of medication.

> **"The webinar made me think about how we organise staff structure related to training and compliance. There is a clear link for me now between incidents, complaints and training"**
> *- webinar attendee*

This webinar is now available on-demand here

Note: You will need to register to access the webinar. You will then be able to log in at the bottom of the registration page. Also find a comprehensive Resources Pack via the recording link.

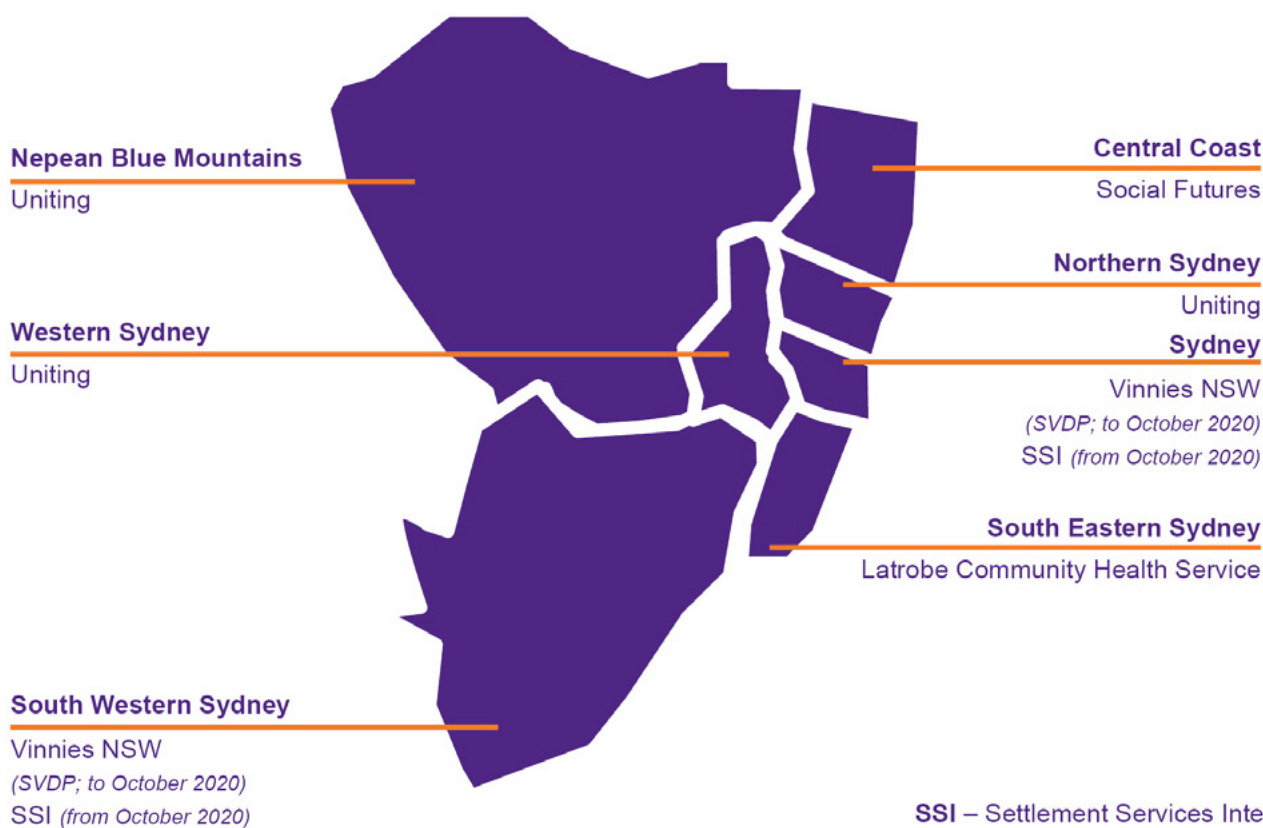## Subscribe to FYI newsletter for future Embracing Change webinars

Please email Project Manager Enis Jusufspahic, enis@mhcc.org.au, to become involved with the Project.

NDIS

New Local Area Coordinators

Local Area Coordination (LAC) services support people living with a disability along their NDIS pathway, by writing and managing their plans and connecting people to mainstream and community services.

LACs, both organisations and their workers, are an important part of the Information, Linkages and Capacity-building (ILC) part of the NDIS. The ILC part of the NDIS helps people living with disability to achieve their goals and be part of community life.

New NSW LAC partners were fully operational from July, with the exception of Settlement Services International, covering South Western Sydney and Sydney, which will commence in October.

Nepean Blue Mountains
Uniting

Western Sydney
Uniting

South Western Sydney
Vinnies NSW
(SVDP; to October 2020)
SSI (from October 2020)

Central Coast
Social Futures

Northern Sydney
Uniting

Sydney
Vinnies NSW
(SVDP; to October 2020)
SSI (from October 2020)

South Eastern Sydney
Latrobe Community Health Service

Key
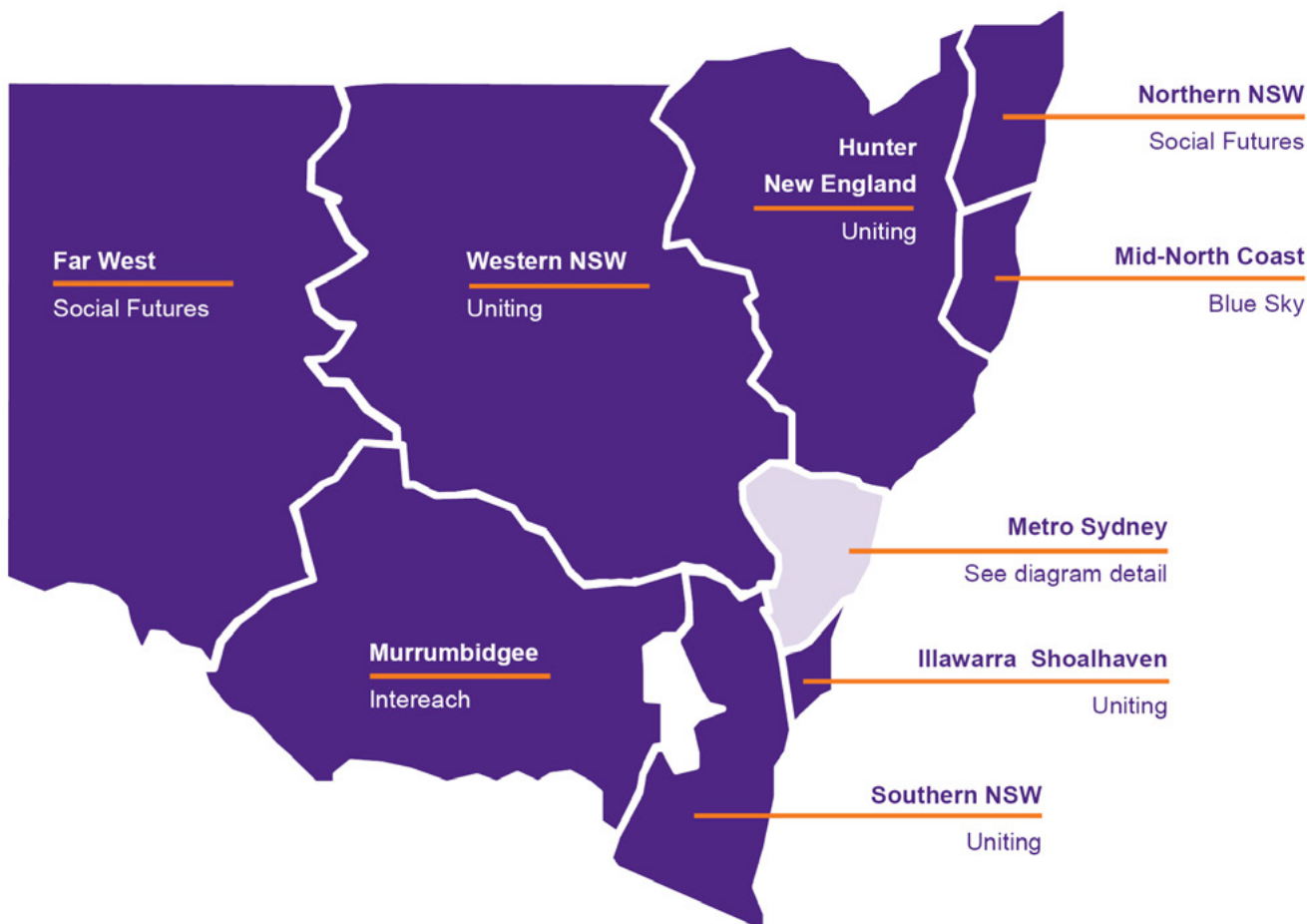SSI – Settlement Services International

New Local Area Coordinators

Settlement Services International

SSI is a new LAC provider. A community organisation and social business, SSI supports newcomers and other Australians to achieve their full potential. SSI helps people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to overcome inequality. The SSI LAC disability contract signals the strength of diversity approaches in service provision.

SSI will serve 16,000 NDIS participants, helping people pursue their goals, exercise choice and control and engage with the NDIS. SSI will also help communities and mainstream services meet the range of needs and aspirations of people with disability.

The SSI vision is to achieve a society that values diversity and supports people in meaningful social and economic participation. It also helps families reach their potential.

Far West
Social Futures

Western NSW
Uniting

Hunter New England
Uniting

Northern NSW
Social Futures

Mid-North Coast
Blue Sky

Metro Sydney
See diagram detail

Illawarra Shoalhaven
Uniting

Murrumbidgee
Intereach

Southern NSW
Uniting

CMHDARN

Conducting Ethical Research

Throughout 2019/20, CMHDARN has hosted webinars on research skills and related research topics. On May 27, CMHDARN held a webinar titled "Ethical and Inclusive Research". Recognising diverse populations in mental health and alcohol and other drugs sectors, CMHDARN brought together four panellists from different communities. Speakers discussed why it is important to recognise diverse communities in research, what consent may look like and what researchers should be taking into account when conducting research with these communities and more broadly.

All panellists agreed that respect, taking time to listen and reporting results back to the communities involved were crucial in any research project.

> " **Panellists agreed that respect, taking time to listen and reporting results back to the communities involved were crucial in any research project.** "

The take home messages from the panellists were:

• "Nothing about us without us"

• Dis-aggregate data as much as possible

• Reframe questions from "as researchers we want to know this" to "what do the people within these communities want to know", ie, ask communities themselves what questions we should research

• Share your research with those involved in the project and more broadly

• When collecting data on communities, be specific about which parts of the community you are collecting data on. For example, if you are researching lesbian, gay and bisexual people, do not say you are collecting data on the LGBTIQ+ community; identify accurately that you are collecting data on lesbian, gay and bisexual identified people

• Ensure you are reaching all the community

• The entire community needs to participate in research from the beginning

• We need to take cultural understandings/context into account in all research projects

View all webinar recordings on the CMHDARN website here

Learning Delivered Online

During the Coronavirus shutdown, MHCC delivered Peer Work certificate courses and professional development online. It was a new experience for everyone and the feedback was positive overall.

MHCC's newest professional development training, Safe Storytelling, was run online for the first time on June 22. Moving face-to-face training online was a new challenge and it is was inspiring that interested learners chose to join us in exploring a new way of sharing information. Learners were given online content to work through at their own pace and we then held a seminar for further discussion. The group that joined MHCC trainer Emma Paino on Zoom were engaged and keen to share thoughts and questions that had arisen during training. It was a challenge to translate some of the face-to-face activities, like sharing your safe story in pairs, to an online forum. Learners were given the option of reflective activities and the people who took part found it an engaging and enjoyable process. Some learners talked about

"Some learners talked about feeling uncomfortable with online learning while others found online learning preferable"

feeling uncomfortable with online learning and missing face-to-face work, while others found the ease-of-access of online learning preferable. We received great feedback after the course and trainer Emma Paino is looking forward to refining the process with each new group of learners.

Peer Work Certificate IV courses scheduled for delivery in Wagga Wagga and Sydney throughout April also ran online. Training was delivered via lecture presentations that students could work through at their own pace. MHCC trainers delivered content in a familiar face-to-face format, followed up by meetings in a virtual classroom, giving students the ability to ask questions, work through assessments and facilitate group discussion. New and existing students were offered phone appointments with trainers and assessors to work through their individual training needs and questions.

Find the full range of MHCC traning on our website

Email training@mhcc.org.au to discuss current training options

Working Collaboratively with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People:

MHCC's Guide to Culturally Safe Practice

Mental health and human services engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a disproportionate rate to other people in the community. MHCC recognises that historically, the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and human services has been and continues to remain contentious. It is critical that services take responsibility for ensuring that their organisational culture and practice approach are both culturally safe and sensitive, and that workers respectfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, maximising equity and access to services.

MHCC undertook a literature review and consultative co-design process, working alongside Aboriginal practitioners and support workers, and people who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from MHCC Member organisations and other human services including Weave Youth and Community Services, the Agency for Clinical Innovation, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council and Penrith Women's Centre. Together we developed a practice approach to guide organisations when supporting First Nations people.

The Guidelines support quality improvement by increasing awareness of what can support Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing. A key driver of the project is the need to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel safe and welcomed when accessing any service. To do this successfully, workers need to be aware that the manner of engagement and communication are key to building relationships.

Download the resource here

MEMBER PROFILE

Grow
mental wellness programs

MHCC MEMBER

Grow Meets the Challenges of COVID-19

David McLoughlin, Branch Manager of Grow NSW/ACT, talks about adapting peer support groups to online during the shutdown

Grow has been providing Peer-to-Peer support since our humble beginnings in Sydney 63 years ago. We have encountered quite a few significant challenges over the years, but nothing like these faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are a community of people founded on sound principles, the key one being that the most important element to each person's recovery is friendship. Hand-in-hand with this ideal goes ordinary expressions of friendship such as greeting each other with a hug, sitting together in a circle at our meetings and socialising between Grow meetings. These are some of the fundamental experiences that contribute to our recovery and rehabilitation once we join a Grow group.

The idea of enforced social distancing was really troubling to us at first, because from our experience, before joining Grow, the one thing that all of us had in common during periods of decline was that we became isolated from our family, friends, community and society. The challenge we faced was how do we continue to meet and support each other from a healthy "social distance" and at the same time keep people connected to their therapeutic community? Fortunately, we have been using Zoom video conferencing in an administrative context for a couple of years now. Also, at a national level, Grow has been developing

"This pandemic has permanently changed our organisation"

eGrow groups using Zoom since early 2018. So, the creation of an alternative meeting space for our groups was just a few clicks away.

With some thoughtful planning, coordination and hard work, our staff team members responsible for the 36 Grow Groups across NSW, were each allocated a Zoom licence. This made it possible to establish a virtual meeting space for each group within a couple of days following the shutdown. Most attendees have adapted well to the online environment and we have even seen an increase in attendance at some of our Grow member organisational and leadership meetings. Also, whilst some groups are eager to get back to face-to-face meetings, some groups are considering continuing to meet online when restrictions are lifted. It seems that for some of our community that the online experience has made our program more accessible and convenient. This leads me to reflect that perhaps this pandemic has permanently changed our organisation, and how we will develop and grow into the future.   **David McLoughlin.**

MHCC is a member organisation. Our members shape the future of mental health policy in NSW. Find more about member benefits here.

New Resources to Build Capacity and Share Research

Well Beings
NADA has produced Well Beings, a short-animation series with practical, evidence-based tips to reduce stress and enhance wellbeing during COVID-19 and beyond.

https://www.nada.org.au/resources/well-beings

Western Sydney Help Line
To help children, teens and adults deal with stress due to COVID-19, Western Sydney Local Health District has launched a free mental health phone service, Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm on 8890 5236

Community Language Self-Care
One Door Mental Health and Western Sydney Recovery College have produced videos explaining why self-care is important in Cantonese, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Mandarin, Punjabi and Spanish, Japanese, Croatian, Bosnian and Tamil.
https://wsydrecoverycollege.org.au/news-event/self-care-tips-for-your-family-in-your-language-2/

Staying Home with Bipolar Booklet
Bipolar Australia and the MAX Foundation have produced a new free booklet which will help people affected by bipolar disorder, including families and carers, to cope more effectively during this difficult time.

www.bipolaraustralia.org.au/resources/staying-home-with-bipolar/

CALD Consumer and Carer Stories
Embrace has added nine new videos created by the CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer Group, recounting personal mental health journeys.

https://embracementalhealth.org.au/community/personal-stories

Trauma Informed Support Films
National Disability Services has launched a new series of animated Trauma-Informed Support films.

https://www.nds.org.au/zero-tolerance-framework/considering-additional-risk

Stolen Generations Teaching Kit
This introduces students to the firsthand experiences of Stolen Generations survivors and includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories, music, poetry, dance, art and writing, developed by The Healing Foundation in consultation with Stolen Generations survivors, teachers, parents and curriculum writers.

https://healingfoundation.org.au/schools/
https://www.socialimpacttoolbox.com/

Cultural Safety Portal
Find a new cultural safety portal for health professionals on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet site.

https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/

While MHCC endeavours to provide the most up-to-date information, we cannot comprehensively endorse the work of external organisations.

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COME JOIN US

MHCC is a member organisation

Help MHCC set the agenda for the community managed mental health sector and define the messages that we communicate to government and service bodies. We need your experience to shape the future of our sector. Become an MHCC member today.

See all our members here